

## **COVID-19 Operating Plan for the Southlake City Judiciary**

Recognizing the need to ensure the health and safety of litigants, attorneys, visitors, court staff, judges, and other individuals entering the buildings housing the courts, the courts of **Southlake** will implement the following protective measures:

### **General**

1. All judges will comply with the Emergency Orders issued by the Supreme Court of Texas and Court of Criminal Appeals, including conducting in-person proceedings according to the guidance issued by the Office of Court Administration regarding physical distancing (minimum six feet), maximum group size, and other restrictions and precautions.
2. All judges will use all reasonable efforts to conduct proceedings remotely.
3. The presiding judge of the municipal court will maintain regular communication with the local health authority and county judge and adjust this operating plan as necessary with conditions in the city.
4. Judges will begin setting non-essential in-person proceedings no sooner than June 30, 2020

### **Judge and Court Staff Health**

1. Judges and court staff who can perform the essential functions of their job remotely will telework when possible.
2. Judge and Court Staff Monitoring Requirements: All city employees (including the Judge) will be required to fill out a questionnaire of potential symptoms prior to coming in for their work shift. In addition, the temperature of that employee/judge will be taken to ensure they are not over 99.6°F. A witness will be required to sign off that they verified the questions and the temperature. This check-in will also be required mid-way through the work day for employees.
3. Judges or court staff who feel feverish or have measured temperatures equal to or greater than 99.6°F, or with new or worsening signs or symptoms of COVID-19 such as cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, loss of taste or smell, diarrhea, or having known close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the building and should seek medical advice. They will be required to work through Human Resources to determine if/when they should return to work.
4. Judges and court staff will be required to wear face coverings, practice physical distancing, and practice appropriate CDC hygiene recommendations at all time including washing their hands for twenty seconds periodically throughout the day.
5. Protective Measures: Judges and court staff's schedules will be alternated to allow for minimum staffing in the office. Face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizer and sanitizing wipes will be provided and will be required to be utilized throughout the day to clean. Sneeze guards will be installed to further protect staff from defendants coming into the facility.

## **Scheduling**

1. The following court schedules are established to reduce occupancy in the court building: Court dockets will be scheduled three times per week instead of two to spread out the number of people coming in each day. The maximums of those dockets will be reduced by half to reduce the number of people coming into court. All defendants are given the option to appear for Virtual Court as opposed to appearing in person.
2. The current backlog of cases to be rescheduled is 1322. Those cases will be scheduled throughout the months of July and August.
3. The court lobby opens to the public effective May 18, 2020. To reduce the number of defendants appearing at one time at the court window, the court staff will be scheduling appointment times for defendants to appear.

## **Vulnerable Populations**

1. Individuals who are over age 65 and individuals with serious underlying health conditions, such as high blood pressure, chronic lung disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and those whose immune systems are compromised such as by chemotherapy for cancer or other conditions requiring such therapy are considered to be vulnerable populations.
2. Vulnerable populations who are scheduled for court will be accommodated by giving them the opportunity to appear in Virtual Court in lieu of appearing in person. In addition, they can correspond with the Judge or Prosecutor through email or hand-written mail.

## **Physical Distancing**

1. All persons not from the same household who are permitted in the court building will be required to maintain adequate social distancing of at least 6 feet. There are markers displayed on the ground in all public traffic areas to indicate where they need to stand/sit.
2. No more than four individuals not from the same household will be permitted in an elevator. If more than two individuals from the same household is in an elevator, no other individuals will be permitted in the elevator. Signage is posted in the elevators to indicate these requirements.
3. Public common areas, including breakrooms and snack rooms, have been closed to the public.

## ***Gallery***

4. The maximum number of persons permitted in the gallery of each courtroom has been determined and posted. The maximum capacity of the courtroom will be monitored and enforced by court staff.
5. The gallery of the courtroom has been marked to identify appropriate social distancing in the seating. Seating is limited to every other row.

## ***Well***

6. In each courtroom, the counsel tables, witness stand, judge's bench, and clerk, court reporter, and bailiff seating have been arranged in such a way so that there is social distancing of at least 6 feet between each space.

## **Hygiene**

1. Hand sanitizer dispensers have been placed at the entrances to the building, outside of elevators on each floor, outside of the courtroom, inside the courtroom and outside of bathrooms.
2. Tissues have been placed near the door of the courtroom, at counsel tables, at the witness stand, on the judges' benches, and in the hallways.

## **Screening**

1. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Court Bailiffs will ask the individuals if they are feeling feverish; have a cough, shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing; or have been in close contact with a person who is confirmed to have COVID-19. Individuals who indicate yes to any of these questions will be refused admittance to the court building.
2. When individuals attempt to enter the court building, Court Bailiffs will use an infrared thermometer to determine the temperature of the individual. Individuals whose temperature equals or exceeds 99.6°F will be refused admittance to the court building.
3. Staff who are screening individuals entering the court building will be provided personal protective equipment, including N95 masks and gloves.

## **Face Coverings**

1. All individuals entering the court building will be required to wear face coverings at all times.
2. Individuals will be encouraged to bring cloth face coverings with them, but if the individual does not have a cloth face covering, a disposable face mask will be provided.
3. Individuals who will be required to be in the court building for over 1 hour will be provided surgical masks and required to wear them while in the court building if the supply is available.

## **Cleaning**

1. Court building cleaning staff will clean the common areas of the court building so that common spaces are cleaned at least every 2 hours.
2. Court building cleaning staff will clean the courtrooms between every hearing, between morning and afternoon proceedings, and at the end of each day the courtroom is used.
3. Court building cleaning staff have been provided cleaning supplies shown to be effective with this coronavirus.
4. Court building cleaning staff have been trained on proper cleaning techniques and provided appropriate personal protective equipment.

**Other**

1. Credit card swipe's are outside the clerk's window so defendants can manage their own swipe transaction. We will still need to obtain their signature on the receipt, so two bins of 'clean' and 'dirty' pens will be available at clerk stations. The 'dirty' pens will be taken and sanitized at the end of each business day.

I have attempted to confer with all judges in the court building regarding this Operating Plan. In developing the plan, I consulted with the local health authority and county judge, documentation of which is attached to this plan. I will ensure that the judges of courts with courtrooms in the court building covered by this Operating Plan conduct proceedings consistent with the plan.

Date: 6/15/2020

  
Presiding Judge of Municipal Court of Southlake